

VZCZCXRO4006
OO RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHSF #0566/01 2321629
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 191629Z AUG 08
FM AMEMBASSY SOFIA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5331
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SOFIA 000566

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/19/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [MOPS](#) [RU](#) [GG](#) [BU](#)
SUBJECT: TFEG01: BULGARIA STANDS BY GEORGIA; STILL AVOIDS
DIRECT SLAP AT RUSSIA

REF: SOFIA 552

Classified By: Ambassador Nancy McEldowney for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Georgian Ambassador Ukleba told Ambassador McEldowney that Tbilisi has not accepted a Bulgarian offer to host talks between Russia and Georgia, which Deputy FM Keremedchiev later confirmed. Ukleba stressed that Tbilisi values U.S. support and humanitarian assistance and looks for a strong NAC statement. Keremedchiev briefed on his visit to Gori and reiterated Bulgaria's strong support for Georgian sovereignty and territorial integrity. Without signaling how far Sofia would go in the NAC, where FM Kalfin would participate, Keremedchiev noted that France and Germany would be instrumental to achieve a strong NAC statement. End Summary.

¶2. (C) The Ambassador hosted Georgian Ambassador Ukleba to underscore U.S. support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. She cited the President's and Secretary Rice's most recent statements, reviewed our humanitarian and assistance package for Georgia and emphasized we would urge immediate Russian withdrawal during the special NAC August

¶19. Ukleba stressed the importance Georgia attaches to U.S. forces providing support and humanitarian assistance. On Sofia's offer to host a Georgia-Russia meeting, he said Bulgarian press reports stating that Georgia had accepted were incorrect. Georgia's response was that it was an "interesting offer" but there could be no talks until Russia withdraws. Ukleba noted that how the international community reacts now will determine Russia's future behavior toward its neighbors.

¶3. (C) Separately, the DCM met Deputy FM Keremedchiev (double hated as Special Envoy for Georgia), who had just returned from Tbilisi. Keremedchiev confirmed that the Bulgarian media had misquoted him regarding Bulgaria's offer to host talks: Georgia had said it would consider positively Sofia's suggestion, but had not accepted.

¶4. (C) Keremedchiev described his August 16 trip to Gori (accompanied by the French Ambassador). The first Russian checkpoint was 20 km outside town, with multiple checkpoints on the way in. Approximately 500-600 Georgian police were standing by to enter the city when the Russians withdrew in order to re-establish a police presence. Keremedchiev doubted there would be an early Russian withdrawal based on troop movements he witnessed. Destroyed Georgian military equipment strewn the road to Gori, the fields outside the town were burned, and Russian tanks, APC's, AIFV's, howitzers and other vehicles and weapons systems were plentiful, with some being

repositioned in the Russian salient while anti-aircraft systems were being pulled back. As for Gori itself, there was little evidence of battle damage (a few shell holes in the central square), but it was virtually empty of civilians (other than the very old and very young) and most buildings were vandalized and looted. He suspected that irregular forces (wearing Russian uniforms but with sneakers or sandals) may have been responsible as the main Russian units seemed quite disciplined. There was no civil authority or police; he and the French Ambassador left before nightfall given the absence of security in town.

15. (C) In Tbilisi, he heard that the numbers of IDP's or refugees had kept growing -- from 28,000 to 40,000 and then more than 160,000 in relatively short order, as reported by the 26 registration places. Tbilisi itself seemed to be operating at quasi-near normal, with lots of patriotism and nationalism on display. The opposition leader told him that they were united with the government vis--vis Russia, but once the worst is over, the opposition will question Saakashvili on his decisions. Keremedchiev voiced concern about Georgia's political stability.

16. (SBU) On Bulgarian humanitarian aid, Keremedchiev reported that 43 tons of medical supplies (valued at Euro 130,000) is ready for shipment later this week once they secure aircraft and permission to fly. Another Euro 130,000 is set aside for transport, logistics and follow on supplies. Bulgaria is prepared to offer UNHCR 100,000 leva for South Ossetia; the Russians have not asked for assistance but probably would not reject it. Bulgaria's offer that Burgas serve as a humanitarian hub still stands;

SOFIA 00000566 002 OF 002

but the Russians are not allowing ship transport into Georgia for now.

17. (C) On the margins of the NAC, FM Kalfin will host lunch for the new Friends of Georgia group. At the NAC, Bulgaria would speak up for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Bulgaria fully supports MAP for Georgia, though this may be farther away now. Keremedchiev speculated that some NATO allies may be soft on statements condemning Russia, much would depend on how France and Germany played their hands.

8 (C) Comment: Keremedchiev stuck to Bulgaria's standard line on support for Georgian territorial integrity, removal of Russian troops, and commitment to humanitarian assistance and support for MAP. He did not venture an opinion on how far FM Kalfin would go in Brussels in taking on the Russians. The government has adopted a very careful line, stressing the humanitarian and sovereignty aspects, while avoiding fierce direct slaps at Moscow.
McEldowney